

## Transforming Internationalization Through Partnerships

FOR THOSE OF US IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, the present moment is both exciting and daunting. A new landscape is emerging, but we do not yet know all its contours. The good news is we do not have to venture into this new territory alone. The forces now impelling internationalization have dialogue and collaboration at their core. This realization moves the exchanges and partnerships in which our institutions have long engaged to the center of any internationalization strategy. And these relationships, in turn, can become the means by which our institutions collectively move forward together.

For international partnerships to play such a role, however, we must rethink what they are about and how we can best develop and sustain them. In this light, it is little surprise that many colleges and universities are working to transform traditional modes of exchange into more full-bodied relationships. In so doing, they are moving from what might be called *transactional* partnerships to *transformational* ones (terms I borrow from the service-learning work of Sandra Enos and Keith Morton).

### Internationalization: Inward to Outward

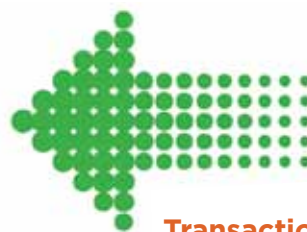
We have long approached international education from a campus-based perspective: what it adds to our individual institutions, generally framed in terms of student learning, student diversity, and sometimes—in rare moments of administrative honesty—tuition revenue. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that this is only half the picture.

To be more specific, internationalization has generally been described as an *inward* process of integrating international perspectives into our institutions. It is, however, increasingly also an *outward* process of positioning our institutions in global networks of learning, discovery, and engagement. The forces now impelling internationalization encompass the reorganization of higher education itself, a reorganization in which campus walls are disintegrating, breached by distance education, civic engagement, the global nature of science and scholarship, the emergence of excellent colleges

and universities in all parts of the world, the power of postcolonial perspectives, and the globalization of the communities in which we are located.

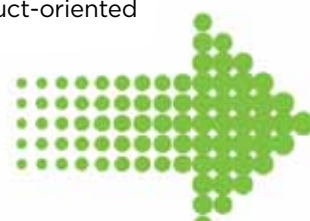
In short, we are becoming part of an academic world larger than our own institutions, and we must reconsider internationalization in this light. We must think of it in outward terms as well as inward. (In this light, my own institution now defines internationalization as “the wise, informed, and responsible engagement of students, faculty, staff, and the institution itself in the global networks that shape us all.”) We must also place international linkages and collaboration at the center of our internationalization programs.

The move toward transformational partnerships reshapes the work of international offices in ways that bring admissions staff into conversation with education abroad directors, visa specialists into dialogue with chief international officers, and all of the above into collaboration with a host of other campus leaders.



**Transactional partnerships exchange resources in clearly specified fashion:**

- resources are traded
- instrumental, focused
- product-oriented



## Partnerships: Transactional to Transformational

It is for such reasons that many colleges and universities are now exploring how international partnerships—whether linking two institutions or several—might do more than they historically have. Many are finding their existing partnerships are plentiful in number but thin in substance: sending a few students and faculty back and forth, occasionally engaging in joint projects, lasting only as long as the original proposers are interested, and often (sometimes immediately) sitting idle thereafter. Such partnerships do not reflect strategic planning and are not seen as integral to institutional mission.

Such partnerships, which are often referred to simply as “exchanges,” also miss the power of collaboration to transform not only individuals but also institutions and even higher education as a whole. As a result, many colleges and universities are also taking a fresh look at what might be accomplished with broader, more sustained partnerships. Institutions benefit from, and must insure that they have, a broad portfolio of partnership types. It is important, however, that this portfolio include partnerships that are transformational as well as the transactional ones that have dominated to this point.

*Transactional partnerships* exchange resources in clearly specified fashion: resources are traded, they are focused, and product-oriented.

On the other hand, *transformational partnerships* develop common goals and projects over time in which resources are combined and the partnerships are expansive, ever-growing, and relationship-oriented.

Both transactional and transformational partnerships have roles to play. Transactional partnerships establish a fluid, easily changed network that supports individual faculty and departmental interests. Transactional partnerships constitute a simple give-and-take in which students and faculty go back and forth between institutions. Such partnerships are easily constructed and work well for achieving specific purposes. They are instrumental and product oriented in nature.

Transformational partnerships, on the other hand, repay the extra care and feeding they require by creating long-term institutional platforms for collaborative work. In transactional partnerships individual faculty or students may be transformed, but institutions generally are not. In transformational partnerships, all parties change as they work together. Resources are shared; collaborative curricula developed; students; faculty and staff drawn into dialogue (including those who have never done international work before); joint research undertaken; and common understandings reached. Transformational partnerships pursue what Susan Gillespie (Bard College) refers to as “genuine reciprocity” or authentic mutual interest in which what happens to the other

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institution(s) is of as much concern as what happens to one's own.

Transformational partnerships expand the capacity of each institution for educating students, conducting research, and serving communities. This is important for institutions that have scant resources to internationalize in the conventional ways of hiring more faculty or building campus programs on their own. It is also important even for those with such resources, for such strategies are no longer sufficient for full-fledged internationalization. Transformational partnerships recognize that some insights and knowledge only arise through dialogue, and that this dialogue must now be global. They function as multidisciplinary academic communities, engendering the development of new projects and activities that go beyond what any side envisioned when the partnership began. They create an awareness of an emerging global system of higher education, and they operate as multinational units within this system.

In some cases, transformational partnerships lead to what Raul Favela (Autonomous University of Chihuahua) calls "transcendental" alliances in which institutional boundaries fade in significance.

Transformational partnerships may begin with specific projects, but they also begin with the understanding that there will be additional projects over time. They are expansive, every-growing. They devote considerable attention to sustaining regular communications, developing common understandings, and initiating new activities. They operate on the belief that not everything can or should be specified in advance. And they focus as much on the relationship as on the products of that relationship. There is an understanding that the most important product may in fact be the relationship itself. Partners are committed to working through differences and offering support in times of crisis ranging from political turmoil to natural disasters.

As institutions move toward transformational partnerships, they find themselves initiating new kinds of activities with new kinds of partners. The 2009 NAFSA Conference Symposium provided some striking examples. East Carolina University has transformed its curriculum (and so have its partners) by establishing live, international videoconference classrooms with three institutions overseas. New Mexico State University and the Autonomous University of Chihuahua have used their long-term, comprehensive partnership to develop a series of joint initiatives that benefit both institutions as well as the intertwined people and economies of their two adjoining states. APLU (the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, formerly known as NASULGC) is using the Africa U.S. Higher Education Initiative to foster deeper and more effective collaboration between universities in these two parts of the world. The audience contributed still more examples, ranging from dual degrees to collaborative campuses to joint research institutes.

My own university has had a 20-year affiliation with Moi University in Kenya that has grown from a simple exchange of medical students to a partnership that has transformed both institutions in significant ways. Together we have now built two hospitals, 26 rural clinics, orphanages, model farms, a craft workshop, and a food distribution center. Together we now treat 80,000 AIDS patients a year in western Kenya and conduct a community-based program of prevention. Students and faculty continue to move in both directions, but they are now embedded in an evolving institution-wide collaboration that has changed curricula, generated dozens of new research projects, and changed our outlook on internationalization in general.

## Transforming the Work of International Offices

The move toward transformational partnerships reshapes the work of international offices in ways that bring admissions staff into conversation with education abroad directors, visa specialists into dialogue with chief international officers, and all of the above into collaboration with a host of other campus leaders. (Because international

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outreach is important on multiple levels, international partnership development has increasingly become an element of more general institutional development.)

The work involved in developing and overseeing transformational partnerships is an iterative process of rethinking, conversing, and modifying. International offices must take the lead in catalyzing and supporting these activities. They should inventory where their institutions currently are with partnerships and lead campus-wide discussions on the importance of international affiliations for institutional missions. These discussions should also result in a set of procedures for establishing and participating in partnerships (transformational or otherwise), as well as modes of oversight and coordination. International offices should also provide seed money and resources for partnership, construct interdisciplinary study abroad platforms at partner institutions, support teaching on partner countries across the curriculum, and provide professional development for faculty and staff in working with international partners.

Above all, international offices should lead their institutions in the dialogue and mutual learning that is part of developing and growing from transformational partnerships. They should articulate the value of collaboration in approaching the global demands of the twenty-first century. They should shape and guide initial conversations with potential partners. They should convene campus-specific meetings to reflect on these initial conversations and move toward or away from the partnership. And once a strategic, transformational partnership is established, they should establish systems of regular communication with the partner (in multiple formats) and assist in developing the new projects and initiatives that result from these conversations.

## Final Thoughts

Deepening partnerships is critical to an internationalization that looks out as well as in. We are at the dawn of a global system of higher education, in which cutting edge research is done everywhere, and students and faculty increasingly swirl from institution to institution. We can approach this situation as individual institutions, or we

can approach it in partnership. The latter makes more sense. Sustained, transformative processes of global dialogue and networking enhance what students learn, advance scholarly agendas, serve global as well as local communities, and create international units of education that can be a force for positive change, both in our institutions and in the world as a whole.

Our institutions have already been pulled into global interactions and relationships. The intercultural learning and

collaboration we ask of our students must become the processes by which colleges and universities themselves fashion new modalities of education, engagement, and scholarship. Just think of what all of us can accomplish, if we do this together. **IE**

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